Aldrich, Nelson W.
CIA1.04 Hunt, Howard
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(orig under Aldrich)

THE JOINER

by Nelson W. Aldrich, Jr.

Undercover: Memoirs of an American Secret Agent, by E. Howard Hunt. Putnam, $8.95.

MORE THAN MOST MEN, E. Howard Hunt (alias Eduardo, alias Edward Hamilton, alias David St. John) managed to put his life at the service of his imagination. As such, his memoirs recommend him to our admiration as earnestly as, in the end, they solicit our pity. The attempt fails on both counts because the imagination he served was from the beginning a sorry thing, a miserable blend of juvenile fantasies and middle-class strivings, of dumb pluck and stupefying conventionality.

Such an imagination needs priming. Slow to learn to read, young Howard was placed in the hands of Alice Robbins, who had taught his father to read and who also happened to be the principal of the elementary school in the Buffalo suburb where the Hunts lived. Miss Robbins was the first of the highly placed figures called upon by the elder Hunt to intervene in his only child's career; through her he was "brought into the world of books, the world of imagination and adventure that was to occupy so large a portion of my later years." More substantive thrills were opened to him by another family connection in 1943. Languishing "at loose ends" as an Air Force officer in Florida, Hunt heard of an elite hush-hush outfit then being organized by Gen. "Wild Bill" Donovan, a Buffalo friend of his father's. Two calls —Orlando to Buffalo, Buffalo to Washington—and Howard found himself in the OSS.

No inference should be drawn that the young man who thus began his "long association with the clandestine services of the United States" was actually a pampered *fils de papa* masquerading as a bold adventurer. Howard so successfully passed the initiation rites of the OSS that his fellow candidates figured that for a plant. In any case, this papa's influence on his son's career was necessarily more moral than material. The elder Hunt seems to have been one of those millions for whom the Great Depression served at once to blast a dream of quick riches (in Miami real estate) and to confirm a death grip on respectability. His world (and Howard's) is that of John O'Hara's Gibbsville, a world of social distinctions so important, and at the same time so fine, that whole melodramas of self-esteem hinge on an invitation to tea, a dip in the stock market, or a date with a Smith girl for the Saturday dance. His son wistfully notes the occasions on which wealth eluded the family: twice his father took a fee rather than shares in return for legal work done for companies that later prospered mightily, and then, just before young Howard was to enter Brown University, his grandfather Hunt perished in an automobile accident that also killed his second wife —not soon enough, however, to prevent passage of the estate from the Hunt family to heirs of the second wife.

Memoirs recalled in the shadow of jail, as these were, are bound to muse on the might-have-been. There's less of that here than one could expect, however, and not enough even to forgive. Hunt's father appears to have taken his reverses philosophically—in the same spirit, perhaps, that Frank Nixon may have thought about the oil that was found under the old family farm after he sold it. But if Richard Nixon sought to redeem his father's bad luck by leaving little to chance and nothing at all to the good will of his adversaries, E. Howard Hunt seems to have looked on fortune more lightly. He recalls Brown University with fondness and gratitude, not for the satisfaction of having worked his way through as his richer classmates did not have to, but for introducing him to Ivy League fashion: "button-down shirts, foulard ties, [the year is 1936] a Shetland tweed jacket, gray flannel trousers and white bucks." He's grateful, too, for classmates through whom he "became familiar with and learned to appreciate the society and life-styles of Honolulu, Beverly Hills, San Francisco, Dallas, Milwaukee, and Chicago." Suburban Buffalo is here beginning to occupy the same place in Hunt's imagination that Yorba Linda had already found in Nixon's.

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name is the Brown University Club of Washington, D.C., where, with consequences more fateful than those attendant on his acquaintance with Miss Robbins and General Donovan, he became friendly with a redoubtable fellow alumnus, Charles Colson. Nevertheless, officers' clubs, country clubs, and hunting clubs do figure predominantly in Hunt's narrative of his adventures. Whether he is a naval officer in the North Atlantic, a *Life* war correspondent in the South Pacific, an Air Force officer, an OSS operative in China, a Marshall Plan staff member* in postwar Paris and Vienna, or a CIA officer in Mexico City, Tokyo, Uruguay, the Balkans, and various Florida staging areas—wherever he is, there, too, is some agreeable and exclusive spot to which he can repair, with drinks, tennis, or horses as effortless diversions.

ONE CLUB THAT HUNT does mention by name, but forgivably fails to characterize as a club, is the Republican party. Membership in the GOP, however, seems to have been as inheritable a fact of life as, say, a taste for shooting birds. As a political statement, its resonance extends no farther than the unshakable assumption that, just as all the best people will naturally be Republicans, so others, like "those unfortunate townies who brown-bagged it daily up the hill [to Brown]," will naturally be Democrats. Political affiliation is a matter of shoes—"white bucks" or "black leather."

This happy assumption encountered some empirical jostling at the Economic Cooperation Administration headquarters in Paris in the persons of Averell Harriman, Al Friendly, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Kingman

*"Through my father, I met Paul Hoffman.... Hoffman agreed to take me on and suggested that I join the staff of the [illegible] Paris, Ambassador Averell Harriman."

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